

GET A HEADS UP ON Catcher's Helmet Safety



While there is no concussion-proof helmet, a catcher's helmet can help protect your athlete from a serious brain or head injury. The information in this handout will help you learn what to look for, and what to avoid when picking out a helmet for your baseball or softball catcher.

Just for Catchers:

Catchers use a special helmet and need other equipment not used by other players, such as: throat, chest and stomach protectors. For the two-piece style, the helmet and the facemask should each have their own certification label indicating compliance with NOCSAE® Standards.

Start with the Right Size:

BRING THE ATHLETE

Bring your athlete with you when buying a new helmet to make sure that you can check for a good fit.

HEAD SIZE

To find out the size of your athlete's head, wrap a soft tape measure around the athlete's head, just above their eyebrows and ears. Make sure the tape measure stays level from front to back. (If you don't have a soft tape measure, you can use a string and then measure it against a ruler.)

SIZES WILL VARY

Helmet sizes often will vary from brand-to-brand, so it's important to check out the helmet brand's fit and sizing charts to find out what helmet size fits your athlete's head size.

Get a Good Fit:

GENERAL FIT

A catcher's helmet should fit like a backwards baseball cap. The helmet should fit snugly all around, with no spaces between the pads and the athlete's head. Your athlete should NOT wear anything under his or her catcher's helmet. *This includes a baseball hat!*

ASK

Ask your athlete how the helmet feels on their head. While it needs to have a snug fit, a helmet that is too tight can cause headaches.

HAIRSTYLE

An athlete should try on the helmet with the hairstyle he or she will wear for practices and games. Helmet fit can change if the athlete's hairstyle changes. For example, a long-haired player who gets a very short haircut will need to adjust the fit of the helmet.

COVERAGE

A catcher's helmet should not sit too high or low on their head. To check, make sure the catcher's mask rests flat on the front of the catcher's helmet. For two-piece helmets, you can tighten or loosen the straps on the sides and top of the face mask to adjust how tightly they grip the helmet.

VISION

Make sure you can see the athlete's eyes and that he or she can see straight-forward and side-to-side.

Take Care of the Helmet:

CHECK FOR DAMAGE

DO NOT allow your athlete to use a cracked or broken helmet, or a helmet that is missing any padding or parts. Check for missing or loose parts or padding before the season and regularly during the season. Be sure to immediately replace face masks if they are bent.

CLEANING

Clean the helmet often inside and out with warm water and mild detergent. DO NOT soak any part of the helmet, put it close to high heat, or use strong cleaners.

PROTECT

DO NOT let anyone sit or lean on the helmet.

STORAGE

Do not store a catcher's helmet in a car. The helmet should be stored in a room that does not get too hot or too cold, and where the helmet is away from direct sunlight.

DECORATION

DO NOT decorate (paint or put stickers on) the helmet without checking with the helmet manufacturer, as this may affect the safety of the helmet. This information may also be found on the instructions label or on the manufacturer's website.



¹ National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment: www.nocsa.org

² Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) is an independent and nationally accredited certification body: www.seinet.org

Look for the Labels:

LOOK FOR A CATCHER'S HELMET WITH LABELS THAT:

- Say MEETS NOCSAE Standard®.¹ That certification label means that the helmet was tested to comply with rigorous and demanding performance standards. Newer helmets may also say "SEI Certified -- MEETS NOCSAE Standard®".²
- State whether the helmet can be recertified. If not, look for the label that specifies when the certification to the NOCSAE standard expires.
- Specify how frequently the helmet must be reconditioned and recertified.
- Have the date of manufacture. This information will be helpful if the manufacturer has: specified a useful life of the helmet; specified that the helmet may not be reconditioned and recertified; or if there is ever a recall on that particular model or year.

If the helmet is not new, you should also look for a label that includes the date the helmet was expertly repaired and approved for use (reconditioned/recertified).

When to Replace a Catcher's Helmet:

CHECK THE LABEL

Be sure to follow safety labels on the helmet on when to replace the helmet. Some catcher's helmets have a label that says that it should not be reconditioned. Helmets with this label will also include how long the helmet can be used. However, some of these helmets may need to be replaced sooner, depending upon wear and tear.

RECONDITIONING

Reconditioning involves having an expert inspect, repair and sanitize a used helmet by: fixing minor cracks or damage, replacing missing or worn parts, testing it for compliance with NOCSAE standards, and recertifying it to NOCSAE standards. Helmets should be serviced regularly by a reconditioner licensed by NOCSAE to recertify helmets. DO NOT allow your athlete to wear a used helmet that has not recently been recertified to NOCSAE standards.

For a complete list of licensed recertifiers, visit the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS): www.nfhs.org/media/1018157/4-20-2017_nocsaereconditioners.pdf.